

**THE UNITED STATES****Reading Essentials and Study Guide 1****From Sea to Shining Sea****Key Terms****contiguous** joined together inside a common boundary**megalopolis** neighboring cities and suburbs that blend into one huge urban area**coral reef** structure formed by the skeletons of small sea animals**Drawing From Experience**

Have you flown in an airplane above parts of the United States? What different landscapes did you see? Did you see mountains? Did you see grassy fields? Did you see rivers and lakes? The United States has much variety!

In this section, you will learn about the land areas and climates of the United States.

**Organizing Your Thoughts**

Use the chart below and on the next page to help you take notes. The United States has many climates. Name each type of climate in the first column. Then in the second column describe the region of the United States in which the climate is located. The first row is an example.

<b>Climate</b>	<b>Region</b>
humid continental	northeastern United States
<b>1.</b>	<b>2.</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>4.</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>6.</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>8.</b>

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<b>Climate</b>	<b>Region</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>10.</b>
<b>11.</b>	<b>12.</b>
<b>13.</b>	<b>14.</b>

**Read to Learn****Introduction**

The United States stretches 2,807 miles across the middle of North America. This part of the country has 48 states that are **contiguous**, or joined inside a boundary. The Atlantic Ocean lies to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. The Gulf of Mexico meets the southern border. Canada is our neighbor to the north. Mexico is to the south.

The other two states are Alaska and Hawaii. These lie apart from the other 48. Alaska is the largest state. It is in the northwestern part of North America. Hawaii lies in the Pacific Ocean. It is about 2,400 miles southwest of California.

**15.** Which two states are not contiguous?

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**A Vast, Scenic Land**

The United States is the fourth-largest country in the world. Russia, Canada, and China are larger. The 48 joined states have five main physical regions. They are the Coastal Plains, the Appalachian Mountains, the Interior Plains, the Mountains and Plateaus, and the Pacific Coast.

The Coastal Plains are lowlands. They run along the eastern and southeastern coasts. The eastern part is called the Atlantic Coastal Plain. The southeastern part borders the Gulf of Mexico. It is called the Gulf Coastal Plain.

The Atlantic Coastal Plain runs from Massachusetts to Florida. Its harbors offer good ports for ships. Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., all lie in this plain. These cities and their suburbs form a single huge urban area, or **megalopolis**.

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The Gulf Coastal Plain is wider and has better soil than the Atlantic Coastal Plain. The Gulf Plain's large cities include Houston and New Orleans.

The Appalachian Mountains rise along the western edge of the Atlantic Coastal Plain. These are the oldest mountains in North America. Their peaks are rounded. Erosion has worn them down. The hilly Piedmont area lies between the Appalachian Mountains and the Atlantic Coastal Plain. This land is very fertile.

Across the Appalachians are the large Interior Plains. This region has two parts. The eastern part is the Central Lowlands. It has grasslands and forests. The fertile land supports many farms. Also located here are the Great Lakes, the largest group of freshwater lakes in the world. They are Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario. Their waters flow into the St. Lawrence River.

The western part of the Interior Plains is the Great Plains. It is a land of grain fields and pastures. The Great Plains stretch from the banks of the Mississippi River west to the Rocky Mountains. The Plains also stretch into Canada and Mexico.

The Rocky Mountains rise west of the Great Plains. They are the longest mountain range in North America. They run from Alaska to Mexico. The Continental Divide is a ridge that runs along the tops of the Rocky Mountains. On one side of this ridge, the rivers run west to the Pacific. On the other side, the rivers run east toward the Mississippi River.

Between the Rockies and the Pacific Coast are plateaus, canyons, and deserts. Plateaus are areas of flat land that rise above the land around them. A canyon is a deep valley with steep sides. The most famous of these is the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

Near the Pacific Coast, the Cascade Range runs from Washington State to California. Volcanoes formed these peaks. The Sierra Nevada mountain range runs along eastern California. Farther west lie the rich Willamette and Central Valleys. Many fruits and vegetables are grown in these valleys.

The Alaska Range forms a semicircle along the north, east, and south sides of Alaska. Mt. McKinley in Alaska is the tallest mountain in North America. The northern edge of Alaska meets the very cold Arctic Ocean.

Hawaii is a group of eight large islands and more than 120 smaller ones. Volcanoes on the ocean floor formed these islands. Some have **coral reefs**. These are structures formed by the skeletons of small sea animals. The reefs lie just above or below the surface of the water.

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**16.** What are the five main physical regions of the 48 joined states?

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**A Variety of Climates**

Most of the United States is in the mid-latitude region. It has a variety of climates. The northeastern United States has a humid continental climate. Winters are cold with lots of snow. Summers are hot. The southeastern states have a humid subtropical climate. Winters are milder. Summers are hot and humid. This region gets many summer storms.

The coast of northern California to Washington has a marine west coast climate. Temperatures are mild all year. Much rain falls, helping huge trees to grow here. Southern California has a Mediterranean climate. Summers are warm and dry. Winters are mild and rainy.

The western Great Plains has a dry steppe climate. Enough rain falls to grow thick grasses. The southwestern part of the United States has less rain. This region has a desert climate. It is very hot and dry.

Alaska has subarctic and tundra climates. In the United States, only Hawaii and the southern tip of Florida have warm, tropical climates with heavy rainfall.

**17.** In what region does most of the United States lie?

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